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ABSTRACT

The report, consolidating the findings from various stages of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory project on interorganizational collaboration in the dissemination of information for educational improvement, includes theoretical considerations, practical applications, and interpretative commentary. The substance of the report is drawn from the four other major project elements: (1) reviews of the literature, (2) research abstracts on appraisals of ongoing programs, (3) a set of ten commissioned papers, and (4) recommendations stemming from two Washington seminars held in December of 1979. (Author/RAA)

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Interorganizational Arrangements For Collaborative Efforts

FINAL REPORT

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FOREWORD

The materials in this document are part of a larger collection of reports prepared by the Dissemination Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. They were produced as a result of a contract awarded by the Regional Program (RP) of the National Institute of Education (NIE), Program for the Dissemination and Improvement of Practice. The Regional Program stimulates and supports mechanisms for improving educational practice and equity through regional approaches. It emphasizes interagency collaboration among decision makers in regions, states, local school districts, regional laboratories, R&D centers, colleges and universities and other educational organizations.

The Regional Program has developed a plan that calls for a set of activities designed to focus organizational resources and capacities on NIE's two goals of improving practice and increasing equity in schools. A major component of the plan is a program that will fund a variety of organizations working in collaboration to undertake promising approaches to practice improvement. The activities carried out by NWREL were designed to provide information and thinking that would be used by Regional Program staff in designing this funding program.

Under the NWREL contract, two seminars were held where RP staff and selected practitioners together explored the issues related to organizational collaboration for practice improvement. This resulted in the volume titled Seminar Proceedings.

Work was also done to provide a basis from research and from other literature for further consideration of Regional Program issues. This resulted in two volumes titled Commissioned Papers and Literature Review.

The contract also resulted in a compilation of information about existing interorganizational arrangements for improving educational practice. This resulted in the volume titled Project Studies. The fifth volume attempts to derive and pull together implications and conclusions from all of these activities and is titled Final Report.

Each of the activities conducted by NWREL was designed to explore four issues that the Regional Program believed were key to planning the new program. These issues were expressed as a series of questions related to the outcomes of improvement of practice and increased equity, through the strategy of supporting alternative forms of interorganizational collaboration and to the mechanism of working through intermediaries. Although these and other relevant questions have not been answered fully, a major step has been taken through this "collaborative efforts" project. This document is made available to you for your own use and to help the Regional Program further understand and clarify issues related to these general topics. We would appreciate your reactions to this document and to the others in this series. Your comments will assist us as we continue to develop and improve the Regional Program. Thank you for your help.

David P. Mack, Regional Program
Team Leader for Development
National Institute of Education

W. E. Ellis, Assistant Director for
Regional Program
National Institute of Education

OVERVIEW

Dissemination system designers and implementors know that the mere spread of paper products will not bring about changes in behavior or improvements in educational practice. Nevertheless, it is, at times, the most readily available, cost-effective initial method at our disposal.

Such is the case with this Final Report and the other four companion products which comprise the result of this project. In retrospect, this is how the project evolved.

- The National Institute of Education's (NIE) Regional Program (RP) had excellent beginning notions of a design for a Regional Grants Program. The essence of these was summarized in the Request for Proposal (RFP) for this project.
- The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), in its response, validated and extended these ideas.
- The action and basic research activities of the project extended and expanded these ideas further.
- Now, these final products summarize and suggest future efforts.

The richness of this project lies, not in the words reproduced here, but in the activities which served to produce them. A variety of methodologies of inquiry was not merely allowed--it was encouraged as the most viable approach to studying and understanding the many complex facets of the subject of Interorganizational Arrangements for Collaborative Efforts. Staff of the project participated in action research which attempted to capture the best thinking of those who, on a daily basis, are immersed in the conceptualized frames of reference--collaboratives, working through intermediaries, improving practice and increasing equity.

The question remains as to how we can best extrapolate from these findings and share the potential "gold mine" of learnings with others.

NWREL proposed to NIE one additional product to the four required of the contract, and that was this final summarizing report. Without an overall summary report which synthesized and integrated the varied project activities, we were concerned that the project would end with this major analysis task yet to be accomplished.

This Final Report, then, attempts to look beyond specific project findings to some future applications.

The reader is reminded that these are the author's views--not necessarily those of NWREL or NIE.

Virginia Thompson, Director
Dissemination Program
Northwest Regional Educational
Laboratory

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Of the many individuals who participated in the preparation of this Final Report, one individual and one group deserve special recognition.

First, it was with special pleasure that the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) welcomed Dr. Louis Rubin as a Visiting Scholar. His primary responsibility was to assist the Dissemination Program in carrying out the work of this project, which culminated in the writing of this Final Report.

Second, many other staff members of the Laboratory have contributed significantly to the preparation of this document. In addition to staff members within the Dissemination Program who coordinated the overall production of this report, people in other support units of the Laboratory assisted in the many tasks involved in its production.

The immeasurable contributions of all of these individuals is gratefully acknowledged.

Commentary: Interorganizational Arrangements For Collaborative Efforts

Louis Rubin

Introduction

Public education is invariably afflicted with a variety of ills. The nature of these maladies shifts as societal conditions ebb and flow. At any given point in time, consequently, some problems become more emergent than others. Currently, for example, the educational leadership is profoundly concerned about stimulating rapid school improvement and assuring that all youth have equal access to learning opportunities.

It is also true, moreover, that as societal conditions undulate, particular governance tactics become more or less appropriate. The effectiveness of a compensating strategy does not depend upon its newness or oldness, but on its applicability to the problems of the moment. It is not surprising, therefore, that as educational change became increasingly complex and cumbersome, federal officials turned to the use of intermediaries and collaboratives as a possible solution. Their hope was that shared resources and cooperative effort might produce a more forceful impact on local school improvement efforts.

The report which follows is an attempt to consolidate the findings from various stages of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory project on interorganizational collaboration and to extract, if possible, a set of theoretical considerations and practical applications. Both theory and practice are important because a sponsoring agency, NIE, was primarily interested in exploring new possibilities. The ultimate goal was not merely discovering a few new bureaucratic maneuvers, but rather enlarging the knowledge stockpile on improvement-oriented dissemination. NIE, in short, wanted to learn what kinds of collaborative procedures,

under what conditions, would offer optimum potential. Theoretical constructs were therefore desirable, because they might yield clues to unsuspected possibilities, as well as help guide any subsequent research. Practical applications, however, were also essential, because they could be fashioned, by capitalizing on what already was known, into immediate reforms.

The substance of this summarizing report is drawn, in the main, from the four other major project elements: (1) reviews of the literature, (2) research abstracts on appraisals of ongoing programs, (3) a series of specially commissioned papers, and (4) recommendations stemming from two Washington seminars held in December of 1979. Since each of these pieces is described in a separate document, the purpose of this summarizing report is to integrate and coalesce. The function of systematic knowledge is to clarify and point the way--a process requiring that diverse information, collected from every conceivable source, be weighed against the specific objective at hand. The interpretative syntheses set forth here, then, is a first step in fitting various pieces of the puzzle together.

It should also be noted, in this connection, that the conjecture and speculation which follow are heavily constrained by the judgment of the author. Much would be lost if the project data--exceedingly valuable in its own right--is not subjected to additional dissection. In our current situation, where the intricacies of dissemination are still but half-understood, further wisdom is most likely to come from broad rather than narrow appraisal. Several officers on the NIE staff, as an illustration, are respected experts in their fields. Their evaluations of the project materials would be extremely useful. This report, therefore, should be regarded as the initial effort in a sequence of subsequent explorations.

In the interest of consistency, the report is organized so that the major concepts derived from each of the project phases is briefly restated. An interpretative commentary then follows.

The Washington Seminars

Two seminars were organized and directed by Joseph Pascarelli. W. Ed Ellis, Assistant Director of the Regional Program, observed, in his opening remarks to the convocation, that NIE has found a profound lack of interagency collaboration in educational change efforts. Acknowledging that precise definitions of school improvement and equity are difficult, Ellis noted that the NIE task is that of utilizing some six percent of the instructional budget to influence the ways in which the remaining 94 percent is spent. This task, he believes, embodies three major obligations: (1) utilizing research findings to determine what really works, (2) enlarging the capacity of state departments and other intermediaries to familiarize school districts with better procedures, and (3) providing services which best ensure the permanent adoption of improvements.

Concurring with these observations, David Mack pointed out that the overriding goal of Regional Program (RP) is to help educational organizations utilize insights gained from research and the field. One major objective of the seminars, consequently, was to determine what policies, services and incentives would be most effective in accomplishing this purpose.

During the discussions which followed, four general assumptions emerged: First, organizations collaborate for different purposes, some of which are constructive and some not. Second, the objectives of a collaborative are crucial insofar as they affect the consequent division of labor, resource use and method of operation. Third, collaboration

among organizations is not a natural phenomenon; cooperative endeavor must be stimulated, supported and sustained. Fourth, even when collaborating organizations share a common goal, strong conflicts of interest may inhibit joint effort. There are, moreover, different forms of collaboration: alliances can be formal or informal, temporary or permanent, voluntary or involuntary.

Several important issues therefore arose. Can, for example, existing "networks" be converted into authentic collaboratives? Since linkers use various techniques in working with networks, can they develop a similar apparatus for working with collaboratives? Finally, how does the role of intermediaries relate to linkers, networks and collaboratives? When, for instance, are intermediaries necessary? Should they provide liaison between NIE and state agencies, between NIE and field projects, between state agencies and field projects, or among several field projects?

It also became obvious, during the debates of the two seminars, that to accomplish its ends NIE must establish some sort of working rationale. There are many paths to educational improvement, with many peddlers selling maps, and a tentative set of guidelines is essential if a cohesive thrust is to develop within the grant program. These guidelines should, among other things, address the following questions:

1. What equity and school improvement problems are appropriate targets for collaborative efforts?
2. What kinds of collaborative partnerships offer optimum potential?
3. What operational "clues" can be derived from a careful analysis of existing collaboratives?
4. What collaboration mechanisms are likely to produce substantial benefits?
5. Who should determine the structure, purpose and mechanics of new collaboratives?

Questions of this sort, however, cannot be dealt with in abstraction. This became increasingly apparent as the discussions returned, again and again, to the true meaning of equity and school improvement. The participants eventually concluded that, despite the complexity of the terms and the difficulty of exact definitions, some operational interpretation would sooner or later become indispensable. A position will need to be taken, as a case in point, on whether equity refers to equality in service and opportunity, or rather, equality in results. In somewhat the same vein, does school improvement imply better instruction, or does the concept of improved practice extend to other parameters.

To make more manageable the great multitude of variables surrounding the role of intermediaries and collaboratives in perpetuating equity and educational reform, each seminar group categorized its conclusions and recommendations to five major areas. The first group focused upon success models, incentives and constraints, types of collaboratives, roles of intermediaries, and evaluation criteria. The second dealt with definitions of collaboratives, functions of collaboratives, operational characteristics of collaboratives, guidelines, and policy recommendations regarding the use of collaboratives.

Although the degree of consensus varied from point to point, it was generally agreed that, in view of the unknowns, much of the planning would need to be based upon conjecture and speculation. Accordingly, RP would have little choice but to rely in considerable measure, upon trial and error. It would be advantageous, therefore, to fund different variations on the theme so as to test, in situ, as many promising possibilities as feasible.

Attention was also drawn to the importance of funding collaboratives which were not only geared toward equity and school improvement objectives, but which might also demonstrate the long-range potential of collaboratives per se. With this in mind, NIE should suggest--but not limit--either the ends or means of collaborative operation. It would be advantageous, moreover, if the funded projects could eventually grow into a national network of collaboratives. The participants also reasoned that, with respectable documentation and analysis, the experiments launched through the grants program could enhance our existing knowledge about interorganizational cooperation, and deepen our understanding of resource sharing among agencies.

Among other recommendations regarding prospective Dissemination and Improvement of Practice (DIP) policy were the following:

1. At least for the purposes of the RFP, those who would be served by a collaborative should participate in the proposal preparation.

2. Efforts should be made to achieve a reasonable balance, in the funded projects, among existing collaboratives undertaking a new thrust, existing collaboratives undertaking an expanded thrust, and new collaboratives undertaking new thrusts.

3. Both the RFP and the grant specifications should make allowances for the political constraints impinging on the collaborative's operation.

4. In anticipation of the exploratory program involving collaboratives and intermediaries, NIE should prepare a set of guidelines, based upon available research evidence, for creating and managing school improvement collaboratives.

5. The grant program should be publicized through multiple channels so that nontraditional agencies will have an opportunity for RFP response.

6. In setting the objectives of potential collaboratives, NIE should make provisions for (a) the particular concerns of the collaborative's clientele, and (b) concerns of high priority to NIE.

7. Major consideration should be given to proposals aimed at assisting target groups which presently are underserved.

8. Two primary factors should govern the selection of grant awards: the importance of the proposed work and the success probability of the proposing group.

Opinions, self-evidently, will differ as to the significance of the above recommendations. None, however, are without merit. In view of the uncertainty and the scant amount of concrete knowledge regarding collaboratives and intermediaries, predominant attention probably should be placed on activities which are most likely to illuminate the dark areas of the subject.

The Commissioned Papers

Ten papers, dealing with different aspects of the objective, were commissioned. Although the topics, in a general sense, were assigned, each writer had considerable latitude in approach. The presumption was that theorists do best when they are allowed to pursue their own special concerns. Such an arrangement, of course, produces a bit of unevenness; but, by and large, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

In a paper entitled Back to Basics in Educational Dissemination Henry M. Brickell contends that educational change, for all practical purposes, is impossible without parallel revisions in government policy. In short, the improvement of local schools is prohibitive until corresponding readjustments have occurred in regulatory agencies. Distinguishing between two kinds of modifications in professional practice, Brickell believes that although "central" alterations can be mandated by bureaucracies, "marginal" shifts are best left optional. Applying this principle to the equity problem, he suggests that Washington, through the Congress, courts and administration must compel greater educational equality for minority students in essentially the same way that the states initiate other programmatic changes. Convinced, as well, that nothing of significance is likely to develop until the true professionalization of teaching has been accomplished, Brickell favors year-round employment for teachers as a means of promoting student-parent-teacher-researcher collaboration in planning desirable instructional improvements.

Reasoning from the vantage point of a State Commissioner of Education, Anne Campbell warns that federal regulations, howsoever well-intended, often restrict Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Secondary Education

Agencies (SEAs) in assisting minority students. Persuaded that "awareness programs" frequently are much ado about nothing, she argues that the federal government should avoid dissemination activities until a particular innovation, important enough to mandate, emerges. These changes, moreover, should be made compulsory through normal legislative, judicial or administrative mechanisms. The real function of federal offices, Campbell maintains, is research and development. Capitalizing on the by-products of such research and development is the proper domain of non-government organizations: publishers, professional associations, school districts and practitioners themselves.

Michael Fullan, in contrast, is more concerned about shoddy and ineffectual dissemination. Good research and development (R&D) utilization, he admonishes, is most likely to occur when the content of the information, the prospective user's approach and the probable setting are aimed at a particular set of clients. Not only must the dissemination information be re-cast in the target audience's own lexicon, but it must also be organized in formats that are applicable to specific situations. Convinced that much dissemination activity is stillborn, Fullan says flatly that if the quality of the content, the conditions for use or the nature of the information are not conducive to direct application, dissemination activities are counterproductive.

James Lipham, one suspects, would agree with these contentions. A recognized authority in school administration, he believes that the importance of the principal's role in educational change endeavors has been seriously underestimated. No improvement of any consequence can be implemented in a school, he writes, without the understanding and support of the principal. Far too little is known, moreover, about the

kind of preliminary interaction which must go on between an external facilitator or consultant and the principal. He opts, in fact, for the creation of a National Cooperative Dissemination Research Program which would investigate the kinds of collaborative planning which encourages successful innovation in schooling. He also favors the creation of a National Dissemination Consortium which could (a) train dissemination interns, (b) strengthen the dissemination capabilities of laboratories, centers and state education departments, and (c) develop workable techniques for administrators engaged in educational improvement efforts.

Equally concerned about the communication breakdown in knowledge utilization, Terry Deal places primary blame on the poor relationship between producers and users, a relationship often characterized by mistrust, conflict and tension. His advice to NIE, consequently, calls for research grants wherein new knowledge is developed through the cooperative involvement of researcher and practitioner.

Rex Hagans, on the other hand, is a good deal more sanguine about the virtues of collaboratives in particular and dissemination in general. The sharing of insights, he argues, will not only perpetuate desirable change, but will also assure that the innovations produce higher standards of improved practice and equity. A number of precautions, nonetheless, are necessary. Rather than simply seeking advice from collaboratives, R&D groups must make their intentions known at the outset, keep potential adopters informed, and work toward maximum practitioner relevance. Timing, moreover, is critical: innovations which reach consumer consciousness either too late or too early run a strong risk of failure. Product-oriented by inclination and experience, Hagans thinks that more action research is needed to reconcile federal and local expectations with

respect to the purpose of collaboratives. They can be extremely helpful, for example, in validating practices and programs stemming from developmental activity, but it would be foolish to assume that they will attach importance to such a function.

Dean Chavers, a college president, believes that the gap between the information-rich and information-poor has widened. Because the disadvantaged have only limited access to information channels, they make little use of the existing system. Worse, few minority persons are able to participate in policymaking, agenda setting and educational "gatekeeping." More than anything else, however, Chavers worries about the fact that most dissemination is comprehensible only to experts. Thus, the opportunity for minorities to take advantage of information is further constrained. What is required, consequently, is an "interventionist strategy" based upon two-way information flow. This flow, he maintains, would permit a greater involvement in planning and evaluation, allow for immediate feedback in field testing experimental materials, help train more researchers and practitioners among disadvantaged groups, as well as expedite product dissemination.

Another administrator, Samuel L. Williams, Principal of Castle Hill Elementary School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, views the knowledge diffusion problem as a symptom of a larger dilemma. Contending that the federal government alone can overcome gross educational inequities, Williams believes it is imperative for NIE to provide relief to those who are unable to cope with federal program guidelines for securing needed services. He echoes, in a sense, Chavers' argument that cultural minorities are given short shrift in information access. His recommendation, resultingly, is for an NIE policy that (a) makes it easier for minorities

to understand that services can be had, and (b) insures that federal funds intended to alleviate the plight of the poor not be dissipated by excessive administration costs.

Ruth B. Love, the highly regarded Superintendent of the Oakland, California school district, believes that many federal efforts fail because they are not authentic programs, but rather people and equipment functioning without a philosophical rationale. She also suggests that educators themselves, because of misconceptions, have contributed to educational inequity. She therefore opts for dissemination materials which help teachers and administrators to recognize the toll taken by low academic expectations, to rid themselves of the belief that the poor are intellectually inferior, and to avoid undue looseness in the instructional curriculum. Of greatest moment, however, she seeks a dissemination message which will enlarge the societal commitment to developing high-calibre educators. Like Brickell, she thinks that it is only after an adequate supply of professional talent has been achieved that information regarding desirable new practices will have a significant effect.

The final paper in the collection was written by a scholar. Exploring the ramifications of equity issues, John F. Heflin thinks that far more research is necessary before the states can effectively improve equality. Skeptical about measuring parity according to "input" rather than "output," Heflin says that "parents and taxpayers are now demanding that school systems shift from a passive role of merely 'providing facilities' to an affirmative role of providing effective opportunity as measured by standardized test scores." To achieve equality, in spirit and intent, state agencies must use the resources of both the

legal sector and the R&D sector in defining the various dimensions of nondiscriminatory policy. In concert with other writers, he places great stock on a trained professional cadre: regional laboratories and centers should document and synthesize the research of the social sciences, helping teacher training agencies to aid and abet--through potent inservice training activities--the efforts of state education agencies to implement equity provisions. Speculating about organizational arrangements for the delivery of services aimed at enhancing equity mandates, he has considerable faith in the potential of collaboratives. The best course, he reasons, would be to test a number of different interorganizational arrangements and, through continuous appraisals, engineer progressive revisions until useful models surface.

It is important for NIE to conceptualize, a priori, its dominant aspirations for collaborating organizations. Once these principles are thoroughly understood, different clusters can band together in whatever ways are most conducive to their situation and purpose. It would be a serious mistake, consequently, to rely exclusively upon any fixed pattern: the anticipated educational changes, the natural environment of the collaborative itself, and the individual and group goals of the partners, all impact on the ultimate complexion of the synergy. As Matthew B. Miles has suggested, it is particularly important to avoid being seduced by the spurious notions that (a) collaboratives must always be tightly engineered and managed, (b) their functions must always be performed in the same way, and (c) the natural life cycle of a cooperative is time-bound.

In sum, the ten papers cover a broad swath. In view of the large number of considerations involved, however, it perhaps could be no other

way. Collectively, the papers serve mainly as a stimulus to consciousness raising: they open our sights to things which might otherwise have been overlooked. Whether or not they are rich in prophetic truisms remains to be seen. But, if nothing else, they provide a firm foundation for further evolution.

The Survey of Existing Collaboratives

Another major aspect of the project involved surveying the operational patterns of a representative selection of collaboratives. Chosen on the basis of their demonstrated history of success, the programs were analyzed with respect to the reasons for their creation, cumulative evolution, organizational structure and guiding philosophy. As with the other components, a complete dossier of the programs surveyed appears in an accompanying report, and the commentary here is therefore limited to some of the major conclusions.

Among other things, the survey made it plain that considerable variation in collaborative partnerships is possible. Some associations, to wit, link several state departments with similar interests; others consist of a cooperative alliance among state departments, intermediate units and local districts; and a goodly number of the federations represent a coalition between school and community agencies. There are, in fact, virtually no restrictions to collaboration other than a common interest in a significant goal.

Similar flexibility exists with respect to purpose. One partnership may seek to increase environmental concern, while a second works toward expediting the delivery of school improvement services, and a third presses for statewide programs of competency based education. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that successful collaboratives seem to have a relatively narrow range of focus. Avoiding Promethean ambitions, they deal with a few objectives and work zealously to maintain a fidelity of purpose. Neither school improvement nor educational equity are intractable dilemmas: both, however, require a precise attack upon

specific problems. Potent collaboratives, consequently, take precautions against diverting their energy: they concentrate on improving reading skills, broadening teachers' expectations, implementing multicultural curricula, and so on. Progress in perpetuating better learning and greater educational equality, apparently, is most effectively accomplished through a sequence of small--but definitive--steps.

The survey also made it clear that most successful collaboratives establish close connections with other dissemination entities. Although every collaborative is, in a sense, a network, developing a groundswell of support for a particular improvement often requires direct linkage with a larger, well-established, communication vehicle. Strategies necessarily vary with intent, but well-orchestrated cooperatives make substantial use of national organizations (NEA, AASA, ASCD), as well as regional units (county offices, BOCES organizations, school boards). The most powerful collaboratives also have an impressive capacity to work both sides of the dissemination street: by carefully exploiting different communication vehicles they serve their own membership, other clients, and the general cause they embrace. A state department collaborative, as an illustration, may fabricate an equity-improving procedure for their own use, share it with other non-member states, and publicize, through some national media, the importance of equity regulations.

Irrespective of their aspirations, moreover, good collaboratives invariably provide their members with a common body of general services. Barring some special obstacle, for example, a healthy collaborative will:

1. Facilitate information sharing
2. Identify common group interests
3. Elicit voluntary involvement

4. Offer problem-solving support

5. Coordinate an efficient method of acquiring services useful to the membership

6. Publicize exemplary or innovative practices related to the alliance's goals

7. Organize talent banks and other referral services

8. Simplify access to materials, money, professional contacts and other essentials

9. Organize advocacy campaigns in support of the group's goals

10. Promote the replication, adaptation and invention of problem solutions

11. Reduce needless duplication of effort through resource sharing

12. Provide demonstrations of experimental programs

13. Clarify what does and does not work

14. Offer services to external clients

15. Foster a sense of community

16. Stimulate cooperative action

At the risk of over-generalization, a parallel set of operating conditions, essential to a successful collaborative, could also be drawn. First, there must be a cadre of highly committed people in each of the cooperating agencies who are willing to contribute time and energy. Second, the sustained support of individuals with organizational power--persons capable of committing full participation--must be assured. Third, deliberate steps must be taken to establish the credibility of the collaborative. Fourth, the agencies involved must be motivated by active interest rather than passive goodwill. Fifth, adequate time must be given to the planning, development and continuous nurture of the association. Sixth, the governing structure of

the cooperative must reflect egalitarian control and a democratic spirit. Seventh, the participating members must be willing to share organizational resources. Eighth, the collaborative's objectives must be carried out by professionals who are directly involved in educational change. Ninth, there must be reasonable congruence between the goals of the cooperative and the vested interest of its membership. Tenth, efforts to strengthen the welfare of the collaborative must be valued and rewarded by the worker's primary employer. Eleventh, the constituent groups served by the consortium must participate in its planning. Twelfth, the alliance's ultimate accomplishments must constitute a clear improvement over the situation which existed prior to its endeavors.

Collaboratives, it would appear, cannot come to life without the usual succession of birth pains. Most, in point of fact, undergo a progression of evolutionary stages. There is, at the outset, a period of formation wherein prospective partners consider the virtues of amalgamation. It is at this point that the determination of common interests, potential for resource sharing, and genuine organizational commitment become crucial. In most instances, a few dedicated people assume responsibility for leadership during the formation period.

Once the architecture of the collaborative has taken crude shape, a stage of clarification ensues. Alternative goals are pondered, the advisability of soliciting additional members and clients is debated, and as the organization's character begins to crystallize, a rudimentary work style and operational philosophy develop. These, however, are still tentative and subject to continuous realignment.

In the third stage, maturation, the accummulated lessons of the collaborative's early experiences eventually result in a more permanent

pattern. Issues regarding the organization's purpose and method are resolved, policies developed out of repeated trial and error become entrenched, and a stable system becomes apparent.

Finally, in the fourth stage, permanence, the collaborative's continuting contributions lead to high credibility, and ultimately, to long-term existence. It is only with a proven record and repetitive success that the shift from a preliminary "seed money" budget to long-term self-support becomes possible.

The burden of these arguments regarding progressive developmental stages is to emphasize that there are no easy recipes for the creation of a collaborative. Nor, for that matter, are there any freshly annointed cures for doctoring sick ones. Collaboratives develop for different reasons, function in different ways, and perform different kinds of services--but they all must grow from infancy to adulthood.

Lastly, a word should be said about the common tactics which are employed by most successful consortia. Although there are exceptions, here and there, collaboratives which have made their mark tend to follow a standard set of rules. One, they avoid competition and deal in services not available elsewhere. Two, they work at achieving a positive image. Three, they make their organizational aims widely understood. Four, they maintain close ties with their members and clients, ensuring that the collaborative's policies are generally known. Five, they maintain high visibility--continually demonstrating their worth--to both their partners and their consumers.

Reviews of the Literature

To make certain that any subsequent NIE policy would reflect current R&D, four reviews of the literature were prepared. In the first of these, dealing with the roles of intermediaries, primary attention was given to relationships between federal and intermediate agencies. When a relatively broad definition of "intermediary" is used (state, regional and local organizations coordinating, administering or participating in federal grant-in-aid programs) a goodly amount of data is available. While all the evidence is not yet in, the premise that intermediaries can advance federal-local interaction is accepted. As things presently stand, however, state departments of education and other interagent organizations sometimes complicate rather than facilitate federal aspirations. A major difficulty, in the opinion of many observers, is that mid-level service groups often are too impoverished technically to provide authentic assistance. Many agencies, for example, lack expert personnel that can provide vigorous leadership. Monitoring procedures frequently are primitive, there is a striking disinterest in evaluation and federal priorities are sometimes misinterpreted or ignored. One suspects, consequently, that federally sponsored school improvement projects often are a compromise between the program's intent and local whim.

The demands imposed by the local situation may have a far greater influence on the activities undertaken than the program goals themselves. Hence, when conflicting agency interests are combined with limited expertise and disparate values on the part of intermediary and local staffs, a certain amount of distortion is inevitable. Such corruption

of purpose perhaps explains why so many federal initiatives, though rich in potential and skillful in design, yield less than optimum results.

Some critics, on the other side of the coin, fault the feds for their cavalier posture and bureaucratic trappings. Kirst, for example, bemoans the complex, vague and sometimes contradictory nature of federal objectives, the policy rigidity and exaggerated emphasis on paper compliance, and the slowness of federal response in approving local implementation plans.

Other critics, however, are outraged by a different villain. A recent Rand study suggests that intermediaries, in many instances, disregard local concerns, rely upon haphazard planning, use scrubby implementation procedures, and generally fail to provide the guidance essential to successful reform. It follows, therefore, that while intermediaries are politically indispensable and potentially valuable resource, they require careful tending. They not only fail, but fail spectacularly, when local commitment to the goals is scant, when federal regulations create serious impediments, and when their own behavior is either careless or ill-conceived.

It follows that in any future federal programs involving the use of intermediaries, a number of precautions are in order:

1. Steps should be taken to prevent the interests of local and intermediate agencies from perverting the program agenda.
2. The grant specifications should provide reasonable guarantee that the recipients will benefit from adequate leadership.
3. Meticulous evaluation of actual outcomes should be compulsory.
4. Genuine commitment to the program's objectives should be a dominant criteria in determining grant awards.

In somewhat the same spirit, moreover, federal officials would do well to make some adjustments of their own. Care should be taken to avoid alienating school districts with overly-ambitious or unrealistic program

objectives, local agencies should be given some autonomy in determining improvement priorities, and federal monitors should offer more direction in helping intermediaries to accomplish their mission. Above all, however, a better working relationship must be achieved among the principal actors in the drama. The criticism of Gross and Herriott is instructive in this regard: "Interactions between the 'feds' and 'locals' were characterized by misunderstandings, misperceptions, distrust, and lack of confidence. At times they appeared to be adversaries, rather than collaborators, in an important educational enterprise." The rules of the game being what they are, the necessary corrective can only come from rearrangements in federal policy.

In sum, then, if NIE can, in one way or another, make its school improvement aims more clearly understood, make greater allowance for accommodating a school's particular circumstances, provide better technical assistance in intermediary planning and implementation, insist upon multiple evaluation measures, and become more accessible to state and regional personnel, much might be gained.

The review of the literature on interorganizational collaboration raises a different set of questions. There is, as already noted, little disagreement regarding the worth of an effective collaborative. Inter-organizational alliances provide the only shelter against increasing service needs, declining budgets and a mounting frustration over the shortcomings of piecemeal solutions to complex problems. Advocates base their faith in collaboratives on two convictions: 1) Well-planned cooperative programs are the most sensible route to accomplishing school improvements too comprehensive to be undertaken by a single agency, and 2) shared resources in countering educational deficiencies produce a more

powerful thrust and better dollar efficiency. Joint reform efforts, furthermore, could well result in advancements far superior to those achieved by a single organization acting in isolation.

The literature also makes it clear, however, that despite their great promise, collaboratives also are fraught with pernicious pitfalls. The mergers must be based upon a mutual determination of service intentions, cooperative planning and collective decision-making. And, to compound matters, the collaborative's energy must be furnished by each of its member organizations. A participating agency may receive far more than it gives, but it must give something. Long accustomed to protecting their territorial rights, organizations that affiliate with a collaborative may find it difficult to abdicate private interest in favor of group welfare. Interorganizational trust and cooperation, after all, are as difficult in education as anywhere else.

The literature also is saturated with stern caveats regarding clear boundaries and realistic goals. Poorly-conceived collaboratives often spend more time justifying their existence than pursuing their aims. And, if there is not a "natural fit"--and a mutually productive relationship--between the collaborators, a fitfull marriage and eventual divorce are predictable. Divisiveness is prompted by conflicts over purpose, methods of rendering assistance, and the value of the outcomes. If such dissention is not controlled by skillful mediation, the collaborative's primary business becomes a matter of internal power struggles rather than client services.

There are, it almost goes without saying, many other exhortations and warnings in the writings on the topic. Most of these, however, already have been discussed earlier in the report. It suffices to say, therefore, that the historical record of school improvement federations has been mixed.

Success and failure have been attributable to diseases of the imagination, to insufficient planning, and to unresolved disharmony. We would do well to remember, nonetheless, that the past has left its legacy for the future. If, to be forewarned is to be forearmed, we can learn a great deal from what has gone before.

Plainly told, strong collaboratives have great utility: they can give technical assistance, help develop policy, "broker" services, and attack, on a multilateral front, egregious problems that have gone unattended. NIE's overriding task, consequently, is to develop a grant structure that maximizes strengths and minimizes weaknesses. If federal regulations can be so constructed that earlier sins of omission and commission are avoided, there is great hope.

The literature on equity, while not without value, leaves much to be desired. There are, for example, few conclusive findings regarding the true meaning of educational equality. Although it is widely acknowledged that inequities do exist, opinions differ with respect to both the cause and the cure. Since students want and require different forms of education, equality of opportunity and equality of result are separate issues. Yet, it cannot be denied that some learners--through no fault of their own--have less opportunity than others. What we are left with, then, is the principle of intended justice. Since there are no legal criteria for determining when equal opportunity exists, the guiding premises become moral ones: the schools must attempt to equalize in every way possible and come as close as they can to a perhaps unreachable ideal.

Operationally, this means that major effort must be placed upon identifying and circumventing the specific conditions which prevent equity. As a case in point, to the extent that insufficient knowledge

about the educational system inhibits some students from taking full advantage of their rights to schooling, dissemination must be invoked as a corrective. And, in those situations where "equitable" implies differential provisions, the instructional program must be bent accordingly. In short, access and opportunity must be unequal wherever fairness requires that learners be given special accommodation to compensate for involuntary circumstances which place them at an educational disadvantage. Dissemination, consequently, has a double responsibility: first, to popularize ethical conceptions of educational equality, and second, to familiarize educators with practices that help offset inequitable conditions.

The literature on improving educational practice, happily, is somewhat more sharply defined. There are, admittedly, profound attitudinal differences as to what kinds of improvements would make the most sense, but convictions regarding the process of improvement are relatively consistent. A good many writers, for instance, note that while planned change, innovation and improvement are by no means synonymous, they do share a number of common denominators. When the accumulated research is distilled, four principles loom large. First, some improvements can be accomplished through the infusion of new knowledge, methods and materials which are developed externally and adopted by schools as the need arises. Second, other improvements, in contrast, must stem from local problem solving ingenuity. Ready made solutions are either inappropriate or unavailable, and new procedures must be developed in situ. Third, in situations where there is either a disinterest or an outright rejection of desirable changes, improvements can only be brought about through administrative action. Special incentives, direct or indirect

coercion, and legislation must all be used, upon occasion, to provoke modifications which, for one reason or another, are resisted. Fourth, some educational practices can only be improved through successive refinements. Procedures must be constructed or imported, modified, adapted and put to test. Then, through repeated trial and error, they must be altered and realtered until, ultimately, they constitute a satisfactory repair.

One also finds in the literature frequent references to pursuits that are of little or no avail in promoting better instruction. The popularization and implementation of an innovation, for instance, is no guarantee of improvements: worthwhile change is dependent upon sustained support and reinforcement after a modification has been introduced. An awareness of available improvements, moreover, does not automatically bring about useful revisions. Knowledge must be matched with desire, know-how, a willingness to undergo the tensions of changeover and patience. Contrary to the utopian pictures often painted in the rhetoric on school reform, thousands of districts are not waiting, anxiously, for the miraculous appearance of better practices. Most, in fact, are perfectly content to carry on as usual. The metaphysics of convenience are seductive, and a passion for rising above mediocrity must be kindled again and again. Finally, innovations which have any hope of living beyond their moment in time must jibe with the real concerns of schools. A need may be present, or it may be induced, but so long as it is absent, little improvement will take place.

REPORT SUMMARY

It is self-evident that the four project components, although important in their own right, have different functions. Collaboratives and Intermediaries are both a means to the Improvement of Practice and Equity, as well as ends in themselves. It would be advantageous, consequently, to fund and evaluate experimental activities which test the utility of collaboratives and intermediaries (a) as a vehicle for improved practice and increased equity, and (b) as useful devices for achieving greater efficiency in the educational system.

School improvement and equitable educational opportunity, in contrast, are goals rather than processes. The important question, then, is how dissemination and knowledge utilization--Regional Program's primary business--can be used by collaboratives and intermediaries to promote better schooling and equality in learning opportunity. To answer this question, if only in part, it will be necessary to award grants which shed the greatest amount of light on the dark corners of the problem.

A special problem is therefore posed with respect to the conditions in the RFP. A too constricting regulatory framework will foreclose imaginative options, and too much flexibility will diminish quality control. By way of finding a suitable balance point between excesses on one side or the other, several protective steps might be taken. The RFP specifications, among other things, should contain guards against the known soft spots of collaboratives and intermediaries, as well as prohibit approaches to equity and improved practice which already have proved counterproductive. The discussions at the two Washington seminars,

the literature reviews and the project surveys, for example, all make reference to tactical errors: imprecise objectives, poor planning, communication breakdowns and so on.

Secondly, it would be desirable to place a strong emphasis upon careful, detailed and differentiated evaluation measures. The largest good will come, not from the funding of a few good collaboratives or effective intermediaries, but rather from discovering what factors govern high performance. On this score, failure, if carefully analyzed, can be as instructive as success. It would be particularly valuable, for instance, to know what kinds of practice improvements--triggered by the instruments of dissemination--are suitable targets for collaborative effort and which aspects of the equity problem are helped by the involvement of intermediaries and which are not? NIE (and public education) will profit, not from success stories alone, but from insights which add up to a perceptive explanation of the way things work. Given proper data, it may eventually be possible to develop a catalogue of school improvements or a taxonomy of equity problems, each of which could be matched by a parallel set of collaboration and intermediary procedures.

Thirdly, the constraints in the RFP specifications which are intended to serve as a buffer against the repetition of past mistakes can be offset by allowing considerable freedom in both problem definition and problem solution. An open-ended proposal format would stimulate imaginative and creative approaches to various Regional Program objectives. The great potential of the contemplated grants lies in the array of new paths which can be cleared. The unwarranted allegations that dissemination is moribund arise, not from a failure of nerve, but rather from short-sighted vision. Beyond an exploration of innovative ways to extend knowledge utilization

and an examination of interorganizational information-sharing, the funded projects can uncover badly needed principles of agency collaboration, brokerage functions and federal-state-local relationships. At the same time, moreover, they may also produce a wealth of bedrock evidence regarding the improvement of educational practice and instructional equality.

It is perhaps permissible, at this point, to interject a personal bias with respect to the purpose of dissemination. Traditionally, there has been a tacit assumption that an awareness of new methods and procedures is an essential prerequisite to constructive change. Put another way, desirable modifications in practice cannot occur until people know of their existence.

The present situation, however, testifies to the fact that awareness is not enough. Practitioners reject many practices about which they are well-informed and, conversely, adopt others on the basis of only rudimentary sophistication. While one might argue, in the spirit of democratic free-will, that this is as it should be, the usefulness of formal dissemination is also put to test.

If dissemination--whether it is defined as awareness, information transfer, innovation spread, or anything else--cannot demonstrate a direct impact on school improvement, it immediately becomes suspect. It is often said, of course, that dissemination is an essential element of change and, as such, an art form in its own right which can be studied and refined, but when all is said and done, both its justification and future will depend upon a solid record of advancing significant educational change. The papers by Anne Campbell and Ruth Love, for example, assert flatly that dissemination should be restricted to clear-cut improvements,

coordinated with forceful inservice training and used foursquare to correct existing weaknesses.

The difficulties are compounded by the complexity of the educational system, the sheer scope of the dissemination process itself, and our ubiquitous itch for tranquility. Take, as an illustration, the case of "engaged time." The research of the past decade has shown that many youngsters may not be actively involved during instruction. Their academic achievement is impaired because they do not pay attention to what is going on. Assuming, if only for the moment, that this fact represents legitimate research knowledge, how can dissemination be used to increase knowledge utilization?

At one level, simply familiarizing teachers and administrators with the research evidence constitutes a form of dissemination. But some practitioners, once aware of the conclusions stemming from the research on active student involvement during instruction, will view the matter as an irrevocable natural phenomenon about which nothing can be done, and ignore the data. In a technical sense, nonetheless, the research has been disseminated and the knowledge utilized (examined) even though no changes occur.

Suppose, instead, however, that the instructional personnel in a school district, confronted with the research on student attention, take steps to heighten motivation, increase the relevance of the learning materials, and alert teachers to the signs of learner "disengagement." Here again, we may presume that dissemination and knowledge utilization have taken place. The major difference, obviously, is that constructive changes have also been made. Howsoever, rational or irrational, onlookers are likely to regard the tangible improvement as indicative of better dissemination.

Consider, now, a parallel situation wherein a developmental group--a regional laboratory, for instance--might pursue dissemination and knowledge utilization at another level. Acting perhaps upon research findings to the effect that teachers sometimes form misconceptions about the learning aptitude of minority youngsters, an instructional unit aimed at reading competency, and a coordinate series of staff development workshops, are developed. Once again, the dissemination and utilization of research has transpired. At this point, however, a different phase of both is brought into play: the secondary dissemination and utilization, not of the basic research, but the products developed from the research, must begin.

Similar problems are then set in motion. The utilization of developmental products, in fact, is, if anything, more problematic than the utilization of basic research. Developers are in constant search of definitive data and experimental evidence since these are the raw materials of their craft. Schools, on the other hand, can make do with obsolete or ineffectual procedures almost indefinitely. Product adoption, therefore, is far from automatic.

The improvement of practice, through the adoption of new programs and products, is impeded by six particular hazards:

1. The dissemination of information about better alternatives may be inept.

2. Widely advertised modifications may, in a given school district, be impractical, too costly, or otherwise prohibitive if local reorganization, making utilization possible, is not undertaken.

3. Potential users may be skeptical about the value of a new method, preoccupied with other concerns, or generally resistant to change.

4. An innovative product or program may be used incorrectly, with poor results.

5. A revision in practice may suffer from insufficient commitment, or falter because of inadequate collateral support.

6. A creditable change with established merits may be used for the wrong purpose and subsequently evaluated according to improper criteria.

The foregoing would seem to suggest that systematic, precise and strong efforts, not pious utterances, will make the greatest difference. Conceived of in broad rather than narrow terms, dissemination and knowledge utilization are a means of elevating educational outcomes. They must, however, be more than partial steps and halfway measures: they fulfill their purpose and come to fruition when changes for the better have permanently altered the system. The naysayers to the contrary, an impulse to improve upon the status quo and a desire for greater accomplishments are fully as much the business of dissemination and knowledge utilization as spreading information, promoting idea exchange or demonstrating exemplary tactics.

For these reasons, it might be helpful if the collaboratives and intermediaries seeking to advance equity and school improvement were to look outward rather than inward and fashion strategies for circumventing the six obstacles listed above. While every problem may not have its solution, most do, and much can be done to increase disseminatory power.

It would be advantageous, in this connection, to capitalize upon existing strengths. SEAs and labs, for example, frequently function as intermediaries. Both, moreover, would undoubtedly welcome an opportunity to participate in collaboratives, particularly if the consortium's goals were congruent with their own. There is, thus, a potential double advantage: SEAs and labs already have relatively well-organized dissemination apparatus which can be exploited, and their leadership capability also can be used to organize other cooperative partnerships. Considerable momentum could

be gained, for instance, from a collaborative that merges the common interests of a state education department, a regional laboratory, an intermediate unit and a cluster of local school districts. Of greatest importance, however, expanding upon existing strongpoints is perhaps the most efficient way of evolving new approaches to dissemination which improve equity and school practice.

Public education, if current events are any predictor, is now entering a period of lean times. Large amounts of money for underwriting new collaboratives, consequently, cannot be counted upon indefinitely. A sensible grant program, as a result, should emphasize planning and organization rather than programmatic support. Ideally, collaboratives launched under the grants will become self-supporting as soon as possible. This expectation, however, may not be as formidable as it might seem: a major hope for the cooperatives is that they will reduce unnecessary duplication and expedite the delivery of services. Presumably, therefore, collaboratives will free their members from existing responsibilities which are better met collectively rather than separately. Should this prove to be the case, dollar outlays now expended by agencies for ongoing tasks can be transferred to a consortium without undue budgetary hardship.

The importance of the monetary factor, it might be added, is difficult to exaggerate. If collaboratives cannot meet their costs through client-derived income, they will, in all probability, be doomed to a short life. It is thus important to learn, from the subsequent evaluations, what kinds of support mechanisms are best. This will necessitate assessments that are organized, not only project by project, but issue by issue as well. Hence, the projects which are funded should

be appraised and analyzed both with respect to individual strengths and weaknesses and with respect to alternative ways of coping with the same problems. Questions regarding finance structure, optimum size, governance, developmental stages, client relationships and so on, can only be answered by comparing different strategies.

Several other barriers will also need to be circumvented. All organizations are autonomous, because autonomy is essential to their survival. Agencies must legitimize their existence by providing services which cannot be obtained elsewhere. Suggestions that they share their sacred domains with other groups not only evoke noncooperation, but outright combativeness. Collaboratives must, therefore, stake out a preserve that does not threaten or encroach upon established monopolies.

Organizations, moreover, rarely collaborate as total entities. Individuals may throw their weight behind a particular effort, and sub-units may join forces with other sub-units, but entire organizations simply are too stratified and variegated to engage in complete synchronization. Yet, since a commitment to joint endeavor of any sort implies organizational endorsement, individuals at the top policy-making level must approve of the partnership and the intent. A bilevel sanction must thus be won; the organizational management and the operational staff must both be pursuaded that collaboration is advantageous.

Another latent impediment lies in the growing reduction of agency slack. As budgetary flexibility erodes during tight money cycles, extra resources for activities beyond basic maintenance become increasingly scarce. Although collaboration does not always necessitate additional investment -- and may even save money -- executives tend to be chary of any new involvement which carries fringe rather than primary benefits.

It cannot be assumed, regrettably, that the logic of collaboration will be irresistably seductive. People in organizations do not always engage in orderly decision making. They sometimes begin with solutions rather than problems, follow instinct instead of reason, and substitute passionate impulse for linear, rational thinking.

Collaboration frequently results in a redefinition of boundaries. Political conflicts over interorganizational and intraorganizational "turf" may develop. When this occurs, questions of power, control and self-protection are inevitable. Not uncommonly, in the resolution of these issues, an organizationally useful--but personally threatening--activity is rejected. Most organizations, in addition, are heavily routinized. Standard operating procedures dominate, role changes are avoided, and customary rituals govern.

Most organizations, nonetheless, are somewhat loosely coupled. Internal units "play with" minor pursuits which may not be representative of the agency as a whole. In the long run, of course, true organizational collaboration will require regrouping, restructuring and retraining. In the short run, however, initial acceptance can be enhanced by soft entry; by modest efforts at interagency cooperation which do not violate the existing system.

The most sensitive judgments, one suspects, will need to be made with regard to the conjunction between equity and school improvement. The importance of educational parity, of course, is beyond dispute: so long as some children are treated unfairly, we must again stir the embers of moral consciousness and strive for greater justice. Equity and school improvement, however, are amorphous concepts. For one ethnic minority, equity implies more attention to native heritage, but for another, it symbolizes instruction that imparts skills essential in the host culture.

When objectives are not clear cut, political interests often overshadow virtuous judgment. Everyone wants general equity and specific programs.

The Regional Program, for many reasons, should not advocate specific approaches to equity and school improvement. It must make due allowance for regional and local prerogatives. But as protection against misguided intentions and opportunistic aspirations, it might wish to stipulate that a local board, composed of representatives from various interest groups, advise the collaborative on its equity and school improvement endeavors.

Viewed in retrospect, the project on Interorganizational Arrangements for Collaborative Efforts has much to commend. Where significant ideas were available, they were brought to the surface and interrelated. Where they were conspicuous by their absence, the void was made known. Discovering areas of ignorance, it hardly needs to be said, often is more valuable than charting areas of knowledge. And, if nothing else, the massive collection of evidence demonstrated that the project goals cannot be accomplished through mental gymnastics alone: to reach our ends we will need to integrate lessons from the theoretical world with the practical insights of actual experimentation.

Knowledge, after all, is proportionate. We know too little--or too much--depending upon our purpose. In the case of collaboratives, intermediaries, equity and the improvement of practice, we certainly know enough to begin. In time, when the grants have been awarded and the funded programs have been measured, weighed, judged and compared, we shall know far more.